

CHAPTER 5

“A Dark Foreign Man”

Constructing Invisible Whiteness in Finnish Sexual Autobiographies from the 1990s

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes a collection of 148 sexual autobiographies to discover how the narratives of sexual experiences and descriptions of sexual attitudes and feelings are connected to notions of race and nationality. The autobiographies, gathered in 1992 in Finland in the FINSEX research project are studied using both corpus analysis methods and close reading. The chapter addresses the construction of Finnish whiteness in a context that is, seemingly, monoethnic and in which race is rarely discussed. While very few authors comment directly on race, there are traces of ethnicized understandings in the texts. The narratives implicitly construct the authors' own white Finnishness as the authors note ethnic differences that make their own whiteness visible and construct the borders of Finnishness. The analysis of these autobiographies offers perspectives on the meanings of race and their connections to sexuality in the early 1990s Finland.

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Introduction

In her sexual autobiography written in 1992, a female author describes her affair in Cyprus during the late 1970s, when she was in her 30s:

And Alexis was so beautiful. During the first night after dancing, we went swimming in the pitch-dark sea and made love for a long time on the yacht club's concrete terrace. I got nasty marks on my back, but during the next night, I got more of them.¹

This description is included in the autobiography's section titled "adventures," where the author describes how, even though she did not seek affairs with foreign men, she ended up in them both in Finland and abroad. With the descriptions of these affairs, the author, as others like her who wrote about their sex lives for an autobiography competition, constructed their understanding of the limits of Finnish sexuality and Finnish whiteness. In this chapter, I analyze these sexual autobiographies to discover what these accounts as well as the interpretations given by the authors for their experiences can reveal of the racialized nature of sexuality in early 1990s Finland.

The researchers who gathered this collection in 1992 were sociologists Osmo Kontula and Elina Haavio-Mannila. Their studies were a part of a research continuum on Finnish sexuality, named in the 1990s as the FINSEX project, which had already begun in the early 1970s with population-level surveys. According to Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's interpretation, by the early 1990s, Finnish sex had become more diverse, Finns were happier with their sexual lives and the sexual lives of men and women had become more similar (Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1993). The FINSEX project had, as its name suggests, at its heart the idea of national characteristics in sexual practices. In the project, an understanding of Finnish sexuality has been produced in international comparisons, when especially the survey results, but also experiences narrated in the autobiographies, have been compared to results of studies conducted in Finland's neighboring countries (Haavio-Mannila and Kontula 2001; 2003; Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch and Kontula 2005). Kontula and Haavio-Mannila (1995; 1997) analyzed these autobiographies in their books, first on sexual experiences in childhood and youth, and later on experiences in adult life (for their results in English, see Haavio-Mannila, Kontula and Rotkirch 2002). These studies addressed the autobiographies from the perspectives of life course and sexual scripts, as well as the differences between generations and those between men and women. Even though Tuija Saesma (2012: 20) has noted that these autobiographies could be analyzed to dismantle the normative representations of Finnish heterosexual whiteness, the construction of race or nationality within

these autobiographies has not yet been a subject of study. In this chapter, I scrutinize these aspects in the texts and analyze them to understand the intertwined construction of sexuality and Finnish whiteness.

As Joane Nagel (2003) states, race and sexuality form each other, and racial borders often make sexual barriers. Nagel (2003: 39–40) emphasizes how race is relational and acquires different meanings in different times and spaces (see also Pugliese 2002). With my detailed analysis of both the narration and the language of the autobiographers, I am able to demonstrate how the writers produced their understandings of whiteness and Finnishness in the intimate context of sexual autobiography. These intersections between sexuality and ethnicity might appear as what Nagel (2003) terms as “sexual cosmologies,” theories of sexual qualities of certain ethnic groups, or simply as descriptions of personal experiences that reveal how sexuality and ethnicity construct each other as habitual, in “manners of being and acting,” as Shannon Sullivan (2006: 23) phrases it. As Sullivan (2006: 24–25) suggests, habits can be both limiting and enabling, as can according to my understanding Nagel’s sexual cosmologies. Both habits and cosmologies encourage certain kinds of actions and encounters, and discourage others. Following Leena-Maija Rossi (2009; 2015: 120–35), I perceive both whiteness and Finnishness as internally unstable categories that need their excluded others to secure their borders. Like Rossi, I perceive sexuality and gender as essential intersecting categories in the construction of whiteness, and analysis of these autobiographies offers an excellent opportunity to address this often subtle and invisible process.

Historically, Finnish whiteness has been a contested question. As Suvi Keskinen (2019: 171–75) describes it, in the 19th and early 20th centuries racial biology Finns were classified as inferior compared to those perceived as part of the “Nordic race” (see also Rossi 2015; Saarenmaa 2017). However, the autobiographies that I analyze here reflect an era when Finnish whiteness was perhaps in the historically most unquestioned position. At the beginning of the 1990s, the assumption of historically monoethnic Finland was firmly established (e.g. Lepola 2000: 21), and as the end of the Cold War produced new shades in Europeanness and whiteness (e.g. El-Tayeb 2011: xiv), Finland perceived itself on the side of the West and the securely white Europe. Indeed, Finland of the early 1990s could be seen as an example of Europe as “raceless” (El-Tayeb 2011: xv), a context where the questions of ethnicity are simply perceived as irrelevant. That said, traveling abroad and increased migration to Finland opened new opportunities for comparison and drawing the boundaries of white Finnishness. On the one hand, as Laura Saarenmaa (2017) states, traveling—be it real or fantasized—opened a way not only to reflect, but also to construct whiteness. On the other hand, Outi Lepola (2000) has analyzed how increasing migration questioned the self-evident position of Finnishness in the early 1990s. My study demonstrates how sexuality and Finnish whiteness interacted when the notion of Finnishness was under a new kind of contemplation.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first discuss the context of these autobiographies, Finland of the early 1990s, and describe the circumstances in which the writers constructed their understandings of whiteness and Finnishness. I also address briefly how ethnicity was described in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's studies. I then describe the autobiographies and my methods of analyzing them with both corpus analysis methods and close reading of the individual accounts. I present my analysis in two parts, first focusing on the experiences of ethnic difference in these accounts, analyzing what the writers noted as racialized features and how race became addressed in the writings. In the second section of my analysis, I focus on the limits and definitions of Finnishness, and analyze how the writers defined Finnishness and how Finnishness in these accounts becomes both stereotypically described and internally unstable. I end my chapter with conclusions on how the analysis of remembering intimate encounters enhances our understanding of how ethnicity was constructed in 1990s Finland and how my methodological combination might offer new perspectives on the fractures in the construction of racialized national belonging.

When Race Does Not Matter? Ethnicity in Early 1990s Finland

While Finland of the 1990s was a seemingly monoethnic society, it was also rapidly changing, and therefore the authors of these autobiographies wrote their accounts in a moment when the understandings of Finnishness were on the move (see e.g. Lepola 2000: 18–19). Historically, Finland had been a society of emigration, but it was now turning into a country of immigration (Mulinari et al. 2009: 7). For instance, during the six years from 1987 to 1993, the percentage of foreign nationals residing in Finland had almost tripled, although the share was still very low in terms of European standards, just 1.1 percent of the total population (Jaakkola 2005: 5). This change ensued largely from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of borders east and south from Finland, and of the first groups of Somalian refugees reaching Finland through Moscow in 1990 (Lepola 2000: 17–18). During this period, the attitudes toward migration and people with a foreign background turned more negative, which was interpreted as an effect of the severe economic depression of the early 1990s (Jaakkola 2005). In more detail, at the time when these autobiographies were written, migration to Finland increased rapidly. In 1990, Finland received 6,492 immigrants with foreign nationality, and the number more than doubled to 13,238 in 1991. In particular, the number of migrants from African countries rose more than five-fold to still a low number of 2,089 individuals migrating to Finland in 1991 (OSF, “11a8”). While these numbers are small in comparison to the rest of Europe, the change was notable in Finnish society at that time.

More directly related to sexualized racial borders, in a study based on repeated surveys on Finnish attitudes toward foreigners, Magdalena Jaakkola (2005) reports that, in 1993, attitudes toward intercultural marriages were at their lowest

during the period covered by her studies, from 1987 to 2003. The attitudes were particularly negative toward marriages with Somalians or Russians (Jaakkola 2005: 83), and only 14 percent of the respondents considered very positive the perspective that they themselves would have married a foreigner (Jaakkola 2005: 107). That said, in 1993, a smaller proportion than six years earlier agreed with the statement that Finnish women are much too easily attracted by foreign men, although 54 percent of the respondents still at least partially agreed with this view (Jaakkola 2005: 90). Interestingly, a similar question was not asked about Finnish men, which reveals the underlining assumption that women’s sexual behavior was an issue of public concern in a manner in which men’s was not. Likewise, an almost equal number, 56 percent, assumed that the rising number of immigrants in Finland would lead to an increase in sexual harassment (Jaakkola 2005: 101). Already, these questions reveal how the foreigners were connected to both sexual appeal and sexual danger. The phrasing of the questions also tells of an unchallenged understanding of white Finnish ethnicity in the questions’ assumption that the survey respondents would not have a foreign background themselves. Likewise, these questions demonstrate how the need for ethnosexual barrier building (Nagel 2003) heightened at the time of growing immigration.

Whereas the number of people with a foreign background in Finland was low in the early 1990s, traveling abroad had become common, which opened increasing opportunities to reflect Finnishness in encounters with foreign nationals. During the 1980s, the number of package holidays to Southern Europe in particular had increased manifold (Selänniemi 1996: 13–14). In the late 1980s, the annual growth in the proportion of Finns who took at least one minimum three-day holiday trip abroad had increased at an accelerating pace. While in 1985, this proportion was 22 percent, in 1989, it was already 33 percent (*Suomalaisten lomat ja vapaa-ajanmatkat 1989* 1990). Statistics Finland has tracked traveling regularly starting from 1991 (OSF, 12qp)—a change in data collection that in itself reflects the growing importance of traveling. In 1991, Finns made 4,470,000 trips abroad, roughly one trip for each Finnish resident. Out of these travels abroad, roughly 1 million were work-related and included at least one night in the country of destination, roughly 2 million were leisure traveling with overnight stays, and 1.5 million were cruises, mostly to Sweden, with overnight stay onboard. At that time, Statistics Finland did not gather information about the destinations of traveling. As Tom Selänniemi (1996) states, sensual pleasures of sunbathing, eating and enjoying warmth played a major role in travels to the “south.” From the perspective of sexual experiences, travels abroad offered an opportunity to explore options not available in Finland, and the autobiographers recalled their experiences of nudism and commercial sex, or simply referred to other countries as freer than Finland.

As Kontula and Haavio-Mannila focused in their studies in the 1990s on the main topic of these autobiographies, sexual experiences, they did not concentrate on the notions of race or nationality. Nevertheless, their studies do

offer some reflections on these topics. In particular, these come up when the researchers discuss sexual experiences with foreign partners. The researchers connected these encounters to the topics of extramarital affairs and holiday flings, and with this emphasis, they portrayed traveling abroad as an exception from the limitations of everyday life. In their study, Kontula and Haavio-Mannila (1997: 694–98) framed casual relationships abroad as insignificant, yet exceptional. Moreover, they also mentioned foreign men in the context of intimate violence (Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1997: 552), and quoted extensively men’s accounts of buying sexual services abroad (Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1997: 529–38). While the aspect of holiday affairs abroad as a temporary oasis of freedom is evident in the writings, the multitude of experiences described is not limited to these casual encounters. The writers also describe long relationships with strong attachments and serious intentions. Sometimes Kontula and Haavio-Mannila cited these accounts, but they framed these with their conceptualization of foreigners as exotic (see e.g. Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1997: 448–51). As Kontula and Haavio-Mannila’s study focuses on Finnish sexual lives, the limits set for Finnishness need to be read between the lines: this framing of foreigners as exotic is one way in which they as researchers constructed the understanding of Finnishness as differing from other nationalities.

Distant and Close Reading of Sexual Autobiographies

The collection of sexual autobiographies that I am addressing here was gathered in the form of a writing competition, titled “Sexuality as part of life” (*Seksuaalisuus osana elämää*). The call for writings, published in newspapers and magazines, invited anyone to write about the role of sexuality in their lives, and instructed the prospective participants to order a leaflet with full writing instructions (the leaflet is reprinted in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1995: 595–99). While the instructions were detailed, the writers were free to choose how they reacted to the questions that addressed education received on sexuality, sexual experiences during youth and adulthood, disappointments and traumas, as well as their evaluation on their present situation and the role of sexuality in their lives. Nothing related to ethnicity or any sort of minority positions was mentioned in the call. The call resulted in 175 autobiographies with varying length, with very different emphasis and varying styles of writing. Out of these texts, Kontula and Haavio-Mannila considered 161 autobiographies as suitable for their analysis (Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1995: 44), and 149 writers gave their permission for future use in research. These autobiographies are now available at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive in digital and anonymized form (Kontula 2015).

This collection of writings is not a representative sample of Finns of the early 1990s. While the writers can be—and have been—compared with the Finnish population by, for example, their age, place of residence and education (see

Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1995: 44–55), what remains is that those who wrote their autobiographies may differ from those who did not. Therefore, much more than a sample, these writings form a collection of the different possibilities present in Finland at that time for thinking and writing about sexual feelings and experiences (on the questions of representativeness in studying life writings, see Summerfield 2018: 135–66). Collecting written reminiscences and autobiographies has a long tradition in Finland and studying them has been an essential element in the Finnish field of oral history research that has utilized written sources in addition to interviews (see e.g. Heimo 2016). While this research tradition was already established by the early 1990s, this collection of sexual autobiographies was more directly inspired by sociological research that had likewise utilized written autobiographies (see, in particular, Roos 1987).

Kontula and Haavio-Mannila’s studies (1995; 1997) treated these texts almost as a transparent link to the writers’ experiences and searched in them for typical events for a certain generation or a certain sexual lifestyle. My own approach in this chapter is quite the opposite: I am not interested in evaluating if the autobiographies present factual accounts of the writers’ lives. In fact, these autobiographies do carry resemblance to the conventions of pornographic writing. This might indicate that porn stories were one resource the writers had to hand when interpreting their experiences (on a similar discussion regarding Russian sexual autobiographies, see Rotkirch 2000: 36–37). It could also mean that some writers took the competition as a chance to experiment with writing about their fantasies as if they had been real-life events. That said, even if the autobiographies were fictional, they would communicate the understandings of sexuality of their time of writing. In my analysis, I pay limited attention to the diverse temporalities within the writings. This is partly because it is often impossible to date the events described by the writers. Additionally, in autobiographical writing, different temporal layers intertwine: the understandings of the time of writing inevitably shape how the writers interpret their earlier experiences, and these earlier experiences construct their understandings at the time of writing (on the multiple temporalities in life writing, see e.g. Summerfield 2018: 88–91). As testimonies of the early 1990s Finnish understandings of race, whiteness and Finnishness, these autobiographies focus on the very intimate context of recounting one’s sexual experiences and feelings. For a large part, they offer views on the stereotypical thinking of that time, but they also give an opportunity to see beyond simplifications, into the diversity of conceptualizations and interpretations given by the writers to their experiences.

The collection of 149 autobiographies is rather large material for traditional close reading, in particular as I focus on a topic that they often only address in passing, that is whiteness and Finnishness. Therefore, I have experimented with other ways of approaching the data. I utilized computer-assisted corpus analysis to discover what kind of understandings of ethnicity and nationality addressing the textual level could reveal. One of the authors wrote her autobiography in Swedish, and this writing is not included in my corpus—I do,

however, analyze it individually with close reading. In addition, as an interesting challenge to this collection as a compilation of *Finnish* autobiographies, one Estonian writer also participated in the writing competition. While she lived in Estonia, she presumably had found the call in one of the Finnish newspapers and magazines read widely by Estonians during the early post-Soviet years. After some consideration, I decided to leave this text out of my analysis. Thus, my material consists of 148 autobiographies, 44 by male and 104 by female writers. I use the three-digit codes given by the original researchers when referring to these writings.

As Finnish language is morphologically complex and the material is relatively small for corpus analysis, I have lemmatized the 147 texts written in Finnish, to facilitate discovering recurring patterns. Lemmatization means that I have returned all the words to their basic forms, and the lemmatized corpus resulted in 600,019 word tokens combined.² To discover the connections between words not easily visible by reading through the material, I have used corpus analysis freeware AntConc (Anthony 2019; Froehlich 2015) to search for collocates, words that appear close to one another more often than would be probable by mere coincidence, and clusters or n-grams, combinations of two or more words. Following the example of Jarmo Jantunen (2018), to present the statistical significance of a collocate, I used Mutual Information (MI) score, which is sensitive toward uncommon words or fixed phrases and usually highlights content words, and a span of four words left and right from the search word. I analyzed collocates with a minimum frequency of five to leave out connections that only occur in a single text. Given the diversity and relatively small size of the corpus, the n-gram analysis provided very low frequencies and very few usable results.

I combined traditional close reading of the material with corpus analysis, a type of distant reading that allowed me to address the collection as a whole. While distant reading with computer-assisted corpus analysis has a reputation for not being particularly sensitive on issues concerning race and gender, like Lauren F. Klein (2018), I claim that it can be a useful tool also for studying the construction of racialized and sexualized positions. Like Klein, I perceive distant reading as helpful for discovering what is hidden in the texts and for getting further from the immediately visible categories. By identifying collocations, I have been able not only to discover which words are connected to terms related to race and nationality, but also to analyze terms that can be used to disguise these topics. Corpus analysis has not yet been used much with autobiographies and personal narratives. However, in this study, it has allowed me to see the material with fresh eyes and to discover even passing mentions of words related to race. My use of corpus analysis is inspired by studies that combine corpus analysis and (critical) discourse analysis (Baker et al. 2008; Lehto 2018: esp. 84–88). That said, my focus is not on identifying the typical discourses in the material, but rather on using corpus analysis to facilitate reaching the diversity and complexities of the experiences. Corpus analysis allows me to identify

relevant sections of the material and to see recurring patterns in even those autobiographies that do not discuss much, or at all, topics related to ethnicity and that would easily fall out from content-driven analysis. In my close reading, I analyze in detail the sections that address race, whiteness or Finnishness. I have translated the quotes from the texts from the Finnish originals as closely as possible, but refrained from repeating the most offensive slurs in English.

Intimate Encounters with Others

As an immediate marker of racial difference is a person's complexion, collocates of the words light or fair (*vaalea*, 96 tokens in the corpus) and dark (*tumma*, 91 tokens in the corpus) can reveal if the autobiography writers utilized these words to mark the differences between people. The collocates of these words are presented in Table 5.1. Light and dark coincide with words related to people, and the collocates reveal how whiteness as a skin color is not, in fact, invisible in the texts, but the word skin (*iho*) is the third on the list of most meaningful collocates of the word *vaalea*, right after two words for hair (*tukka* and *hius*). Dark, on the other hand, has no association with the word skin, but it is connected to the color of hair and eyes, showing that the people described in the texts are not noted by their dark skin color. In addition, the word dark is associated with the word for handsome (*komea*), indicating a masculine connotation that is not visible with the word for light. While the frequencies are small, the comparison between these collocate lists confirms the invisibility of non-white-skinned people in the autobiographies and shows how still some writers considered the light skin color as worth mentioning.

The more precise words for skin color are infrequent: the word white-skinned (*valkoihoinen*) appears in the autobiographies only once, and dark-skinned or black-skinned (*tummaihoinen*, *mustaihoinen*) do not appear at all. That said, the context of this only appearance of direct reference to white skin color is both interesting and telling. In his autobiography, a 45-year-old male writer (129) remembers his encounters with commercial sex abroad. He narrates how he had first searched for porn during his trips to Sweden, and then he recalls his experience as a spectator in a sex club in Hamburg, Germany. When describing the show he saw, he names two male performers as white-skinned. Their whiteness becomes relevant in the context where some of the other men were not white, as the writer describes them first as “three dark men, not quite black but very dark”³ and later as a “dark mixed-race man, not fully black either.”⁴ As in the study by Kevin A. Whitehead and Gene H. Lerner (2009), whiteness as a category becomes named and its self-evident position questioned only when it is particularly necessary. In this case, the need stems from the author's aim for a detailed description of what he saw at the sex club and his observation of the racial differences between the performers. However, as the author is a spectator in this setting, he does not need to name his own whiteness. This account

Table 5.1: Collocates of the words *vaalea* and *tumma*.

vaalea

17 collocate types

237 collocate tokens

Collocate	Translation	MI-score	Frequency
tukka	hair	9.17231	7
hius	(individual) hair	8.49186	5
iho	skin	8.38022	5
pitkä	tall, long	6.86872	10
nainen	woman	5.36146	19
eräs	one, certain	5.23263	5
nuori	young	5.12263	5
tyttö	girl	4.98352	10
toinen	other, second	3.76843	6
ja	and	3.67106	46
joka	which, that	3.62107	10
mies	man	3.34175	7
hän	he, she	3.33700	19
olla	to be	3.11115	55
tulla	to become, to come	2.98498	5
minä	I, me	2.70842	13
se	it	2.17835	10

tumma

21 collocate types

258 collocate tokens

Collocate	Translation	MI-score	Frequency
komea	handsome	9.23061	7
tukka	hair	8.76405	5
pitkä	tall, long	6.79388	9
rinta	breast, chest	6.57457	6
silmä	eye	6.48059	6
tyttö	girl	5.64565	15
pieni	small	5.64565	6
kaksi	two	5.46444	6
nainen	woman	4.99805	14
myös	also	4.60612	6
mies	man	4.31200	13
joka	which, that	3.96128	12
kuin	as	3.85806	7
hän	he, she	3.68980	23
ja	and	3.61699	42
toinen	other, second	3.58257	5
olla	to be	2.72889	40
kun	when	2.70677	5
minä	I, me	2.54458	11
se	it	2.39303	11
ei	no	2.07309	9

is one of the two occasions in the collection where the writers use the Finnish *n-word*, translated above as black. The other is an account (058) where the writer recalls his visit to a gay bar in Finland and a tall, handsome Black man who approached him. The author, who was heterosexual himself and patronized the bar with his gay friend, describes how he feared hurting the man's feelings as he rejected these approaches.

As traveling abroad had become common by the early 1990s, these autobiographies reflect trips both for work and leisure. They mostly address experiences within Europe, including the countries of the (former) Soviet Union and Turkey, with further destinations as sporadic examples. The autobiographies demonstrate how traveling had only become a possibility during the recent decades and was for many writers still a notable exception in their lives. However, as the collection also includes writings by those who traveled extensively, these accounts become highlighted when addressing race and nationality. One of the writers narrating his frequent travels is a male author (034) who was 61 years old and retired at the time of writing. In his autobiography, he recalls finding his future partner after the Second World War and narrates their long marriage, which had not prevented him from searching for other sexual encounters. In addition to his long-term affair in Finland, the author remembers his encounters abroad that involved paid sexual services. He describes in detail the women he met as he traveled to Leningrad and Tallinn during the late Soviet years both as a tour leader and as a tourist (on imagined sexual encounters of Finnish men in Soviet bloc countries described in porn magazines, see Saarenmaa 2017). He recalls the women he met fondly, naming them as "the sweet Ekaterinas and Galinas." Especially when describing his encounters with women from the Soviet Caucasus, he describes these women as exotic, alluding to the sexual desirability of racialized others. The writer names the ethnic groups of these women in a manner in which he does not discuss other women in his text. He details the features of these women, such as black blue hair or dark almond-shaped eyes, and describes a scene where a woman performs a dance dressed in an "Islamic" outfit. While these encounters took place in Tallinn and Leningrad, in the very western corners of the Soviet Union, they show how traveling within the Soviet Union was common and different reasons, as in this example dancing in a dance company, brought people from faraway regions together.

In the end of his autobiography, the author compares the women he names as "Slavic" with Finnish women and even uses the word race in this context, demonstrating how racialization works also to differentiate between people who are white by their skin color (regarding in particular the position of Russians in Finland, see Krivonos 2019: 31-37). According to the writer, while there are different nationalities of "Slavic" women, they are all characterized by the societal structures that shape their attitudes toward sexuality. In his opinion, the "Slavic" women are more lively by their nature, which is particularly visible in how they perceive sexuality as a joy in life and a form of art. He refers to a

notorious survey conducted in the early post-Soviet years according to which being a prostitute was a preferred future profession for young women (on this survey, see Bridger and Kay 1996: 32–34), and interprets this result as an indication of “Slavic” women’s will to combine work with pleasure. This emphasis on the pleasures of sex, even if it is paid for, is evident throughout his description of his own encounters, and his autobiography describes the blurred line between paid and unpaid sex. This may, partly, refer to the fact that in the Soviet context exchanging sex for services or goods did indeed blur the line (Rotkirch 2000: 203–07), but it also echoes how in the 1970s Finnish pornographic stories the fantasy of the excessive sexuality of racial others was marked in how even prostitutes could not help enjoying sex (Saarenmaa 2017). In addition, the statement contributes to the author’s own self-image as a lover rather than a customer, which likewise echoes the Finnish innocence depicted in the 1970s porn magazines (Saarenmaa 2017: 40) and bypasses the uneven economic positions of a Finnish man and a Soviet woman. These inequalities are only referred to in passing, for instance, when the author mentions a sweater he has brought with him to be sold in Leningrad (for memories of Finnish tourists’ unofficial trading in the Soviet Union, see Kuusi 2013).

As at the time of writing these autobiographies, Finland had a very low number of residents with a foreign background, the encounters with them could have been noteworthy for the writers. The authors recall people of whom they mention their nationality, but also those whom they name as foreign, possibly with an explaining national attribute. The word foreign or foreigner (*ulkomaalainen*, 18 tokens in the corpus) clusters with the word man, which is notable as the authors also recall encounters with foreign women—these women are just not described as foreign (cf. Jaakkola 2005: 90, on the interest in foreign men as objects of women’s desire). From the writings, it is often impossible to interpret what, in fact, the term foreign means. Being a Finnish citizen or long-term resident, or, indeed, having a background of generations in Finland might not have made one Finnish in the eyes of the writers (on the (im)possibility of an immigrant being perceived as becoming a Finn, see Lepola 2000: 363–72).

To exemplify how those named as foreigners and their ethnicity become relevant in the autobiographies, I analyze a writing by a 30-year-old female author (003) who had married young and who, after the marriage had run its course, had short-term affairs, one of them with a young “Moroccan Arab.” She had met this man on her way to work and, according to her words, only became interested as the man seemed exotic. She states that her interest was not of a sexual nature, and she was surprised when he seemed to take for granted that their relationship would be sexual. As the author was missing sexual encounters at the time, she decided to sleep with the man, as she found him attractive. However, their relationship did not last long: “The man made love as I imagined an Arab would: fast, strong, completely concentrating on his own feelings and forgetting me. I did not take it personally. We met only twice, and then we both ran out of interest.”⁵ In the autobiography, the account of this affair works

as a prelude to a longer and more meaningful relationship. During the following winter, the author moved to a nearby town, and felt open to new adventures and affairs. She narrates:

So I was attuned to the right state of mind when one morning on my way to work a dark foreign man stepped into the bus. My short affair with the Arab had somewhat lowered my mental barriers and I did not much think of him being a foreigner. He had wonderful eyes, which fastened to my own for some reason. I felt a strong feeling of recognition. As if we had known each other in some previous life.⁶

Even without any words, a connection formed between the man, described only as a dark foreigner, and the author. In addition, while the writer states that she did not think of the man as a foreigner, she immediately connects this encounter to her earlier affair with the Moroccan man. The autobiography continues with how the writer remembers meeting the man again on a bus a couple of days later:

The man saw me and looked at me, as if he would have wanted to hold on to my eyes and he came to sit next to me on the opposite side of the aisle. We simply stared each other in the eyes the whole trip. I do believe in love at first sight, but I think this was a crush, it was exotic, and I had all along waited to find a man.⁷

The narration contrasts in how the author describes the feeling of familiarity with this man, but how, simultaneously, the man could be any man—an exotic dark foreigner, but also simply someone who is available. This contradiction is present throughout her description of their affair: the author describes how the touch of the man's hand feels wonderful and electrifying and yet she analyzes how it was her own feelings rather than the man's actions that made her so excited and aroused. Moreover, she offers cultural explanations for his behavior. She recalls being sure that the words "I love you" meant less for him than for her, and assumes that in his "world" she was too active for a woman. The author compares this experience with her earlier affair with the Moroccan man, and again she felt that the man did not take into account her feelings:

The man was a prisoner of his cultural background, a male chauvinist, to whom satisfying the woman did not even cross his mind. I tried to talk to him but it was like talking to a wall: he looked at me as if I would have asked for the Moon or spoken a foreign language.⁸

The writer does not mention which language they spoke, but considering that she describes the man as a foreigner, it is very likely that they indeed spoke a foreign language, at least foreign to one of them. The author obviously had

a strong idea of the sexual particularities of “Arabs,” which she then utilizes to explain her experiences with both of these men. In addition, this account is an example of what the word dark refers to in these autobiographies. The author does not describe the skin color or other features of the foreign man, but as eyes and gaze are important in the account, the writer mentions his “chocolate eyes.” In addition to the fact that the writer utilizes the word exotic when describing both of her affairs, also the reference to chocolate eyes constructs the man as a delicious, edible “Other” (Rossi 2009: 197–99).

In addition to analyzing what kind of sexual encounters the writers place to foreign countries in their memories and what kind of sexual characteristics they attach to foreigners and foreign cultures, it is worthwhile to note which experiences are *not* tied to foreigners. In particular, homosexuality, one of the “cracks” in the nationalist hegemonic understanding of sexuality (Nagel 2003: 167), has often been perceived as something foreign (e.g. Dunn 2016: 95–97). In Finland, homosexuality has been at least since the 1950s considered as a Swedish import, and even as a “Swedish disease” (Juvonen 2006: 51; on intergrating homosexuality into Finnishness, see Järviö 2018). In these autobiographies, this understanding is not present, although one author (125) refers in passing to how homosexuality was more common in a country that is unnamed in the text, but that is described as different from Finland by its culture and religion. In addition, the collection includes one account of same-sex relationships abroad. This autobiography is written by a 30-year-old woman (086), and it is the only text in the collection written in Swedish. The author recalls her experiences in the early 1980s Stockholm feminist circles and her affair with another woman there. In her account, however, the setting abroad is not of importance as such, but the account tells of the existence of a larger feminist community and the more prominent role of lesbian feminism in Sweden compared to Finland. While these autobiographies include plenty of experiences of same-sex desires (Taavetti 2019), none of these highlights ethnicity.

On the Limits of Finnishness

As expected due to the lack of explicit discussion on race and ethnicity in Finland in the early 1990s, the terms race or nationality are rarely used in these autobiographies. The word race (*rotu*) is used, in addition to the reference to the ethnicity of the women from Caucasus discussed above, by two writers who emphasize that everyone is an individual regardless of their race, and the word nationality (*kansallisuus*) appears only on these occasions. In addition, two male writers refer to their female partners’ exceptionally beautiful legs as *rotusääret*, and one female writer presumes that men who are very attracted to women’s large breasts constitute their own “race.” These rather peculiar ways of using the word highlight how the term race was not commonly used at the time of writing. Echoing this silence on discussions on differing ethnicities, only

one author (125) acknowledges the existence of racism, as she mentions it as a reason why she needs to meet her Pakistani lover in secret.

Comparably to the absence of the direct discussion on race or nationality, the term Finnish does not coincide with words that would demonstrate how the writers understood their own nationality. Finnishness is, in these texts, omnipresent and the authors do not name it with recognizable attributes, as they do not reflect on what is self-evident for them, their own nationality (cf. Lepola 2000: 354–63, on the construction of Finnishness in political debates on migration during the 1990s). A more interesting result is that the analysis of collocates of different words referring to foreigners does not provide results that could be read as descriptions of how the authors understood foreigners, which could, in turn, be used as a negation of how the writers understood Finns and Finnishness. To study this, I constructed a word-search list consisting of different names of countries, cities and nationalities mentioned in the autobiographies. The collocates of the word in this list consists of terms related to traveling and do not include words that could be interpreted as descriptions of foreign people. Therefore, the analysis of how the writers construct Finnishness must be searched within the writings by close reading.

As Saarenmaa (2017) has analyzed, in the writings of Finnish pornographic magazines of the 1970s, the dreams and fantasies of traveling were common, even though mass traveling was only just becoming possible. These dreams, fantasies and published stories also formed the frame within which the autobiographers interpreted their experiences of traveling and encounters with foreigners. Obviously, encounters during travels were not solely with locals, but also with other tourists, Finnish and foreign. Indeed, the travels may have offered a space for contemplating one's own national belonging (e.g. Andrews 2005). Therefore, despite the scarcity of direct discussion on Finnishness, some of the texts construct even explicitly the difference between Finns and foreigners often in relation to experiences of traveling. A female writer (060), 38 years old at the time of writing, had started traveling abroad alone at the age of 35, after divorce from a marriage she had entered while being just a teenager. Before accounting her experiences of traveling, she describes her life situation at that age—being single, in a well-paid job, and having “not learned the life of women.” She makes clear the distinction between herself sitting smoking and drinking black coffee at her apartment window, and the “overweight mothers” gossiping by a sandbox in the yard. Her views on Finnish men were even harsher, and she felt torn by her sexual desires and her disdain of Finnish men. During her first trip to Italy, she realized what she had lacked in her life and how alone she was. In her text, she immediately opposes the assumption that her revelation was of a sexual nature: “No, I did not fall under the Italianos with jet-black eyes,” she writes. Her traveling was frequent, and in her Mediterranean destinations, she acquainted herself with the locals. She summarized her observations and her own experiences with the following:

And what was common to all these foreigners was the one and the same thing: joyfulness, friendliness, authenticity and love of people. And men. I never met a married man who tried to sleep around. Married couples were very liberated and happy. I lived those holidays fully and honestly to myself. On every holiday, I had someone. I enjoyed the holiday, I enjoyed tenderness, I enjoyed freedom, and I enjoyed making love.¹⁰

The author describes how her search for freedom led to sexual encounters, usually in the form of holiday flings that ended with her flight home. At the time of writing, however, she had met a German tourist during her holiday in Central Europe. This man had proposed marriage to her, and they were about to leave for a vacation together. Interestingly, even though the author emphasized the importance of sexual desire in her relationships and praised how her holiday lovers “love like only someone from the southern country can,”¹¹ she formed a relationship with a blond German man. Here, the blondness reads as a marker of whiteness that differentiates the German man from darker foreigners. As Whitehead and Lerner (2009) note, sometimes whiteness is mentioned to counter the assumption of some other ethnicity, and in this case blondness differentiates the German from the author’s Mediterranean lovers. To borrow Nagel’s (2003: 14–17) terminology, the author ended her “ethnosexual sojourn” closer to home, with a man resembling her own white Finnishness.

If this author described her disappointment with Finnish men in comparison to her experiences with men abroad, a 54-year-old male author (113) expressed comparable views regarding Finnish women. This writer describes how his marriage had broken down and he was convinced that finding a Finnish partner in his 50s would be difficult, and therefore he had signed up for a service that arranged marriages with women from the Far East. He started a correspondence with a young woman from the Philippines, and at the time of writing, this woman had just moved to Finland. He states that “to me, this Far Eastern girl makes the Finnish woman seem like a complete asshole.”¹² He describes his new life with this “wonderful creature”:

All the caring and serving full of love that I have completely spontaneously received. Never before have I been rubbed with fragrant cream in the evenings and tucked into bed like a small child, not to mention the cooking. It feels like I would be in an incredibly pleasant dream and I am afraid of waking up.¹³

It is evident that this male writer did not expect to build an equal relationship and was happy when he had found a woman who did not seem to expect that either. In his praise of unequal partnership, this author is not alone. A somewhat similar idea is present in a text by a 68-year-old female writer (174) who describes how the men she met during her holidays “treat their woman

as a pearl."¹⁴ Comparably to how the male writer's sole experience of a Filipina partner provoked him to judge "the Finnish woman" collectively as an "ass-hole," this female writer does not even name the foreign country in which she enjoys her holiday romances. Therefore, her description reads as a statement that Finnish men, unlike her foreign partners, have not treated her as a pearl. This desire places her as a willful object, not as an equal partner, similarly as the male writer who enjoyed being "tucked into bed like a small child." Both these writers contradict the understanding of how sexual lives in Finland had become more gender equal (Kontula and Haavio-Mannila 1993) and, in fact, this development was not something they hoped to occur.

When considering the limits of Finnishness, those who can be perceived as outside of the national entity, but who are nevertheless rather close, can illuminate the boundary-building processes. These autobiographies do not offer traces of "kinsmen" thinking (Keskinen 2019) in relation to Estonians, often perceived as similar to Finns, even though the writers do describe travels to and encounters with Estonians. Indeed, Estonians were one of the nationalities that had lost their popularity according to Finnish surveys on migration at the turn of the 1990s (Jaakkola 2005: 72). It is possible that as the changing situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union placed Estonians as immigrants from the Finnish perspective, they were not perceived as similar or as "kin" as they were both earlier and later. Surprisingly, the Turkish are the only nation referred to as kin to Finland, although the writer (141) assumes that this is something that only the Turkish themselves believe.

Observing racialized differences even closer to home, the references to Roma in Finland are very scarce and consist mostly of repetition of hearsay or proverbial expressions. Only one writer, a 48-year-old man (118), recalls his own encounter with Roma. This occurred in his youth in the 1950s countryside:

As an arousing memory, a bike trip home from the village burned in my mind. Three gypsy girls walked on the road with their black hair flowing.—Pick us up, and you will get some, they called at us. For some time we traveled with the girls. They even hung from our bikes' carriers. How could we give them a ride, there was three of them and two of us. And we did not even have a place where to lie them down. I really felt helpless. I should have a motor bike, so I would drive further with the girl. I was irritated and aroused by the girls' curiosity-awakening offer.¹⁵

In this description, the writer notes the black hair of the Roma girls and a bit later ponders the girls' "black tuft" he was almost able to see, marking the differences from the other girls in his surroundings. This sole encounter complies with the image of Roma as sexually promiscuous that is one aspect in the construction of the stereotypical differences between the Finns and the Roma. The girls are, according to this author, casually offering to engage in sexual relations

with unknown boys they have just met. As Eija Stark (2019) has analyzed, Finnish folk tales associate Roma with uncontrollable sexuality, which is in contrast with the chaste attitude toward sexuality in Roma culture.

The references to Sámi people, another minority in Finland to whom sexualized connotations have been attached, are even fewer than those to Roma. In fact, the word Sámi is not mentioned in the corpus at all. The only direct comment on Sámi people is by a 61-year-old male writer (034), whose account of sexual adventures in Leningrad and Tallinn I analyzed above. This author comments that he has no experience of “Lappish” women and refers to Sámi with a pejorative word derived from yoik singing. This comment forms a closure to his description of the regional differences he has noted among Finnish women. According to the writer, those from Eastern Finland are less restrained and more impulsive, especially compared to the women from Ostrobothnia on Finland’s western coast that he considers as the other extreme. This writer produces the similar kind of exoticizing categorizations of women from different Finnish provinces as he does on foreign women. These reflect the popular understanding of Finnish nation as a combination of differing tribes, and in this account, the writer projects these assumed differences on sexuality.

Conclusions: Producing Finnish Whiteness in Heterosexual Memories

In this chapter, I have analyzed the racialized understandings tied to sexual encounters in autobiographies. These writings reflect the naturalized understanding of Finnish whiteness that prevailed in the early 1990s, as none of their authors names their own ethnicity, and none of the accounts offers opportunities to question the writer’s own white Finnishness. However, in the accounts this mostly invisible whiteness becomes named when it contrasts with non-white bodies, as Finnishness becomes—implicitly or explicitly—defined as it contrasts with foreigners. The authors utilize stereotypical understandings of what the “others” are like, and use these to explain their experiences. In addition, these accounts demonstrate the structural power imbalances between especially Finnish men and women from lower-income countries, and exemplify the utilization of racialized markers in these exchanges.

Analyzing both the descriptions of the encounters and the words utilized for ethnicity allows to alternate between close reading of individual autobiographies and distant reading of the collection as a whole. This methodological choice proved useful precisely because race and nationality are not topics of these writings as such, but are only visible in subtle references and as one aspect in the narratives of sexual encounters. Throughout the study, the use of corpus analysis combined with close reading in a circular manner. It offered an opportunity to review if something analyzed on the level of a single text

could also be discovered in other autobiographies. Likewise, I was able to conduct new searches with the words I discovered during close reading. That said, searching for certain words has its limitations when addressing a topic that is rarely directly addressed in the texts. Sometimes, as when comparing the collocates of different words, I can note the absence of a certain topic, but there are limits to what one can read into this silence. A similar combination of methods could be utilized with other collections of written reminiscences and autobiographies. As these collections have been gathered in Finland for decades, the material is vast, and as often the collection work has been conducted by culturally significant organizations, such as the Finnish Literature Society, these collections could offer intriguing perspectives on how the writers position themselves in relation to the assumed Finnish whiteness and how they participate in its construction.

My analysis has addressed the construction of white Finnishness from the perspective of entangled sexuality and ethnicity at a particular historical moment when Finland was perceived as monoethnic and questions of race were therefore regarded as insignificant, but when this situation was also starting to change. The early 1990s was therefore a moment when the self-evident position of Finnish whiteness was questioned as migration to Finland was increasing and also the autobiographers describe their encounters with foreigners in Finland. Likewise, increasingly common trips abroad, also reflected in these autobiographies, provided opportunities to compare Finns with other nationalities. My analysis demonstrates how these societal changes affected the intimate context of sexual encounters and sheds light on the complex process of ethnosexual bordering at an individual level of narrating one's own sexual history. As my study shows, the role of race in the narration is not straightforward, but the understandings of ethnicity work both to enable as well as to limit what the authors considered as possible. These autobiographies utilize and construct stereotypical thinking of different nationalities, the Finns included, and produce racialized hierarchies. That said, the writers also narrate how they have formed intimate relationships that overcome prejudice. These examples of crossing ethnosexual borders, however, often framed the "others" with an exoticizing gaze that shows how deeply the prevailing understandings of racialized differences affected even the most intimate experiences.

Notes

- ¹ "Ja Alexis oli niin kaunis. Ensimmäisenä yönä menimme tanssimisen jälkeen uimaan pilkkopimeään mereen ja rakastelimme kauan purjehdusklubin sementtisellä terassilla. Selkään jäi pahat merkit, mutta seuraavana yönä niitä tuli lisää." Kontula 2015: 014. All translations by the author. The names mentioned in the quotes have been changed.

- ² I used LAS program (Mäkelä 2016) for lemmatization. To increase the quality of my material, I went through the whole corpus manually and corrected clear spelling mistakes and wrong lemmas.
- ³ ”kolme tummaa miestä, ei aivan neekereitä, mutta hyvin tummia.”
- ⁴ ”tumma sekarotuinen mies, ei hankään täysin neekeri.”
- ⁵ ”Mies rakasteli sillä tavalla kuin kuvittelin arabin rakastelevan: nopeasti, voimakkaasti, täysin omiin tunteisiinsa keskittyen ja unohtaen minut. En ottanut sitä henkilökohtaisesti. Tapasimme vain kaksi kertaa, sitten loppui kummankin mielenkiinto.”
- ⁶ ”Niinpä olinkin virittäytynyt sopivaan mielentilaan, kun eräänä aamuna työmatkalla bussiin astui tumma ulkomaalainen mies. Lyhyt suhde arabin kanssa oli hiukan madaltanut mieleni raja-aitoja enkä ajatellut miehen ulkomaalaisuutta sen enempiä. Hänellä oli ihmeelliset silmät, jotka jostain syystä jäivät kiinni omiini heti kun mies tuli autoon sisälle. Koin voimakkaan tuntemisen elämyksen. Olimme kuin tuttuja jostain entisestä elämästäme.”
- ⁷ ”Mies näki minut ja katsoi kuin olisi halunnut ripustautua katseeseeni ja tuli viereeni istumaan käytävän toiselle puolelle. Koko matkan vain tuijotimme toisiamme silmiin. Uskon rakkauteen ensi silmäyksellä, mutta minusta tämä oli ihastusta, eksotiikkaa, ja sitä, että olin koko ajan odottanut löytäväni jonkun miehen.”
- ⁸ ”Mies oli kulttuuritaustansa vanki, soviniisti, jolle naisen tyydyttäminen ei tullut mieleenkään. Yritin puhua hänelle, mutta olisin yhtä hyvin voinut puhua seinälle: hän katsoi minua kuin olisin vaatinut kuuta taivaalta tai puhunut vierasta kieltä.”
- ⁹ ”Ei, en kaatunut pikisilmäisten italiaanojen alle.”
- ¹⁰ ”Ja kaikkia näitä ulkomaalaisia yhdisti yksi ja sama asia: iloisuus, ystävällisyys, aitous ja ihmisrakkaus. Ja miehet. En koskaan kohdannut ukkomiestä joka yritti mennä vieraisiin. Avioparit olivat hyvin vapautuneita ja onnellisia. Minä elin ne lomani täysillä, itselleni, rehellisesti. Jokaisella lomalla oli joku. Nautin lomasta, nautin hellyydestä, nautin vapaudesta ja nautin rakastelusta.”
- ¹¹ ”rakastaa vain kuin etelämaalainen sen tekee.”
- ¹² ”Tämä kaukoidän tyttö on saanut suomalaisen naisen tuntumaan minusta täydelliseltä paskiaiselta.”
- ¹³ ”Kaikki se huolenpito ja rakkautta uhkuva passaaminen, jota nyt olen aivan sponttaanisti osakseni saanut. Ei ole ennen minua iltaisin voideltu hyväntuokuisella voiteella eikä peitelty sänkyyn kuin pientä lasta, ruuanlaitosta puhumattakaan. Tuntuu kuin näkisin tavattoman hyvää unta ja pelkään herääväni.”
- ¹⁴ ”käsittelevät naistaan kuin helmeä.”
- ¹⁵ ”Kiihottavana muistona mielessäni paloi kylältä pyöräilty matka. Kolme mustalaistyttöä kulkea kepsutti mustat tukat hulmuten tiellä—Ottakaa kyytiin, niin saatte, he huutelivat meille. Jonkin matkaa kuljimme tyttöjen

kanssa. He jopa roikkuvat tarakassa kiinni. Miten niitä kyytiin olisin ottanut, kun heitä oli kolme, meitä kaksi. Eikä olisi ollut paikkakaan, minne tytöt olisi kellistänyt. Kyllä siinä tunsin itsensä avuttomaksi. Pitäisi olla moottoripyörä, niin hurauttaisinkin tyttö kyydissä kauemmaksi. Harmitti ja nostatti himoa tyttöjen antama uteliaisuutta herättävä tarjous.”

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